

April 1, 1999

Dockets Management Branch
Food & Drug Administration
Department of Health & Human Services
12420 Parklawn Dr, Room 1-23
Rockville, MD 20857

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Dear FDA:

I'm writing to urge the FDA to act on the petition filed by United Poultry Concerns in April 1998 (Docket #98P-0203/CP) and ban the forced molting of laying hens. This practice to increase egg-laying efficiency and manipulate egg supply involves starving the birds for days and increases the cruelty of factory egg farms and the probability of salmonella contamination.

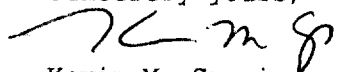
In nature usually around the beginning of winter, birds replace their feathers with new ones. During this process of molting, hens stop laying eggs for up to four months at a time and concentrate their energies on growing new feathers.

The egg industry artificially changes this natural process of molting to ensure all hens molt simultaneously in order to optimize and manipulate egg supply, reduce the amount of time the hens are not laying eggs, and ensure higher shell quality in a calcium-deficient diet. Donald Bell, the "founder" of forced molting, urges complete food removal for no less than five days. By combining the fast with water removal, drugs, and artificial light manipulation, the industry forces the hens to change their natural cycle, abruptly shed their feathers, and stop laying eggs for only one or two months instead of the natural three or four.

Researchers have found that forced molting ruins the birds' immune systems and increases the risk of salmonella infection in the laying hens and their eggs. Salmonella is a bacterium that causes serious illness in humans. The Centers for Disease Control list salmonella as one of the "top ten mostly deadly infectious diseases." Immunologist Peter Holt of the U.S. Department of Agriculture says the U.S. egg industry should find less stressful ways to produce eggs than putting the hens on starvation rations.

At any given time, over 6 million hens in the U.S. suffer forced molting. Considering the battery hen must also endure confinement crammed into small cages, unsanitary conditions in close proximity to the waste of other birds in the sheds, and painful debeaking, the life of egg-laying hens is truly miserable. These horrific conditions increase the likelihood the birds and people who consume their eggs will be infected with dangerous salmonella. I urge the FDA to act on the petition filed under #98P-0203/CP by United Poultry Concerns on April 17, 1998, and ban this cruel practice to safeguard human health, not the short-term profits of large agribusinesses. I look forward to your prompt response. Thank you.

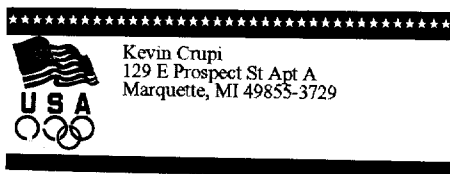
Sincerely yours,



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